



Office of the
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Ottawa, May 8, 2000

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Federal government services in both official languages in British Columbia: The situation remains unsatisfactory

The Commissioner of Official Languages, Dr. Dyane Adam, today published a follow-up report on federal offices designated to offer services in both official languages in British Columbia. This is the second last of a series of thirteen follow-up reports that evaluate the progress achieved in each province and territory since a special study conducted in 1994.

The report shows that despite the fact that slight progress was made since the 1994 study, the results obtained are still not acceptable. The Commissioner notes that it is still difficult to obtain quality services in French on a consistent basis by telephone. The designated offices seem to experience some difficulty providing the public with documentation and forms in both official languages. As well, the two-language greeting in person in designated offices is still very much lacking.

Federal institutions designated to offer bilingual service are obliged to take measures to encourage clients to choose the official language in which they would like to be served. The report reveals an improvement since 1994 in the two-language greeting on the telephone, but also a certain inconsistency in the way that the personnel in designated offices answered telephone calls. In fact, employees used a bilingual greeting constantly in 50% of cases studied, and only occasionally in 31% of cases. In 1994, the bilingual greeting was used on the telephone consistently in only 44% of cases.

As for the bilingual greeting in person, only 19% of designated offices used a two-language greeting, compared to 4% in 1994. "Federal institutions in British Columbia must take concrete measures to immediately correct this deficiency which has existed for too long. The lack of a bilingual greeting discourages French-speaking clients from exercising their language rights", indicated Dr. Adam.

The availability of services in French in person has increased from 72% in 1994 to 89% in 1998, however there was clearly a deterioration in the availability of services in French on the telephone. In fact, only 64% of offices were able to provide consistent services in French, and 31% of offices were able to provide French services on an occasional basis. This compares with the consistent availability of services in French 90% of the time in 1994.

"Services in French must be available to the French-speaking community in British Columbia at all times, in all designated offices," insisted Dr. Adam.

The Commissioner reiterated her support for the initiatives of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique who work constructively to ensure that their rights are respected by conducting their own audits of federal government offices designated to offer services in both official languages.

Dr. Adam deplores the fact that the Fédération receives little support and feels isolated in this undertaking. "I would like to strongly encourage the Treasury Board and federal institutions to play a

more active role by collaborating with the Fédération in order to correct the shortcomings outlined in this report and to ensure that the Francophone population benefits from improved services in its language."

The Commissioner will present her final follow-up study in June which will deal with federal offices designated to offer services in both official languages in Ontario. A summary report that will analyze the overall situation across the country will follow before the end of the year.

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Information

Commissioner's Representatives (Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut Region)

Date modified: 2007-08-29